

The Financing of Parliamentary Waste Land Enclosure: Some Evidence from North Somerset, 1770-1830¹

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I
HISTORICAL studies of enclosure, the process by which the system of cultivation was transformed from the traditional and corporate method of farming in common to the modern and individualistic one of farming in severalty, have tended to focus upon the arable open fields rather than upon the commons and waste lands.² Indeed, the changes in farming organization outside open-field England have been most informatively explored in recent years by those approaching the subject as geographers, although attention has then necessarily been concentrated on the physical rather than the economic aspects of change over time.³ There is therefore a need for the subject of the waste lands to be reclaimed by historians, to ensure that the generalizations which are made about the financing of enclosures are not unduly weighted by the research bias towards the open fields.

This paper is concerned with the subject of waste-land enclosure costs. It will be

demonstrated that, contrary to the assumption amongst modern agricultural historians that land sales were of little significance as a way of financing enclosures until the nineteenth century, in North Somerset at least the method was well established by the 1770's. Ample evidence of this claim can be extracted from the enclosure awards which reveal details of both the financial and economic costs imposed by this method. The paper examines, first, the financing of the North Somerset enclosures, and second, the relationship between this evidence and that which is generally available on the subject. By emphasizing the economic aspects of the enclosure of the waste lands it is intended that this study should offer a corrective to both the traditional concern of historians with the arable open fields, and that of geographers with physical change.

II

Our initial concern is with the parliamentary enclosure of some 42,000 acres of waste land in the northern third of the historic county of Somerset, stretching from the southern slopes of the Mendip Hills northwards to the River Avon. Within this region there were three quite different farming areas. First there were the uplands, chiefly the carboniferous limestone Mendips and its outliers but including also the southerly extensions of the oolitic limestone Cotswolds, for example Dundry Hill south of Bristol. Second, there was the northern extension of the central Somerset

¹This article draws substantially on chapters 2 and 3 of B J Buchanan, 'Capital Formation in North Somerset, 1750-1830', thesis submitted to the University of Bristol, 1979. I would like to thank Professor W Ashworth and Dr C G A Clay for their helpful comments and advice. I am also grateful for the help received from Mr D M M Shorrocks of the Somerset Record Office (SRO) and Miss M E Williams of the Bristol Archive Office (BAO) and their colleagues.

²The case for the inclusion of the waste lands was made by E K C Gonner, *Common Land and Inclosure*, 1912, pp 192-4, but they have been excluded by more recent scholars, for example D N McCloskey, 'The Enclosure of Open Fields . . .', *Jnl Econ Hist*, XXXII, 1972, pp 15-35.

³For example Michael Williams, 'The Enclosure of Waste Land in Somerset, 1700-1900', *Trans Inst Brit Geogs*, LVII, 1972, pp 99-123, and John Chapman, 'Parliamentary Enclosure in the Uplands: the Case of the North York Moors', *Ag Hist Rev*, XXIV, 1976, pp 1-17.

Levels, low-lying and frequently flooded peat bogs and alluvial lands that skirted much of the coast from the mouths of the Rivers Axe to Avon and lay inland by the river valleys. Third, there was the rest of North Somerset, undulating lands between the northern slopes of the Mendips and the River Avon, made up largely of fertile red marls and sandstones. By the mid-eighteenth century this last area was already long enclosed and attuned to the market economy provided by the growing city and port of Bristol and the seasonal influx of visitors to Bath.⁴ It was therefore the under-utilized potential of the uplands and low moorlands, offering common sheep pasture and cattle grazing respectively, that excited interest in the second half of the eighteenth century.

The impulse to enclose, of course, was felt widely at this time, but whereas in many counties the wastes remained common grazing ground until pressures were further intensified in the French Wars,⁵ in North Somerset these were with some small exceptions the only areas still to be enclosed. It was to them, therefore, that attention was turned, first to the Mendips from the 1770's and then to the Levels, with interest in the latter increasing from the 1790's. The reasons for these differences in timing can be suggested only briefly, but it seems likely that the enclosure of the uplands began early in response to wheat prices which fluctuated upwards from the 1750's because these lighter soils could be more easily adapted to tillage than the richer but heavier soils of the wet grasslands. The incentive to enclose the latter came with the significant rise in meat prices during the war years.⁶ These stimulated a change in the organization of landholding in the Levels, if not in land use.

Evidence of the financing of North Somerset enclosures did not at first seem promising. Commissioners' accounts are rare, thus ruling out the possibility of a study of costs like that conducted so comprehensively for Warwickshire, and very little extra-award material has been found, unlike that discovered for Buckinghamshire.⁷ However, a close study of the surviving awards for the period housed in the Somerset Record Office has revealed that, in the absence of financial details of a more orthodox nature, there is nevertheless an alternative source of information which can be used to the same end. This indirect evidence is to be found amongst the profusion of organizational details in the awards, for these frequently record both the amount of land sold to finance the enclosure and the capital sum thus raised. It may seem a kind of legerdemain to transmute this land transaction into the total public cost of the enclosure in question, but the commissioners were instructed by the relevant Acts of Parliament to sell such proportion of the land to be enclosed as they judged would enable them to cover the cost of the undertaking, and the details in the awards indicate that they did so. Corroborative evidence comes from the only award accompanied by a set of commissioners' accounts, for the sum realized by the sale of land as recorded in the former tallies exactly with the total cost of the enclosure as accounted for in the latter.⁸

It is this practice of land sale which makes the North Somerset evidence on financing markedly different from that of other areas studied intensively, though this is probably only a reflection of the former concentration on the open-field counties

⁴W E Tate, *Somerset Enclosure Acts and Awards*, 1948, pp 13-25; Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation*, 1969, pp 92-3.

⁵Michael Turner, *English Parliamentary Enclosure, its Historical Geography and Economic History*, Folkestone, 1980, pp 86-93.

⁶J D Chambers and G E Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1880*, 1966, pp 83, 110.

⁷J M Martin, 'The Cost of Parliamentary Enclosure in Warwickshire' in E L Jones (ed), *Agriculture and Economic Growth in England, 1650-1815*, 1967, pp 128-51. M E Turner, 'Some Social and Economic Considerations of Parliamentary Enclosure in Buckinghamshire, 1738-1865', PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1973, and 'The Cost of Parliamentary Enclosure in Buckinghamshire', *Ag Hist Rev*, XXI, 1973, pp 35-46.

⁸SRO, Shipham and Winscombe Enclosure Award, Q/RDe 13, 1797-99.

already observed. Indeed, the method was frequently remarked upon by earlier writers who had a wide if generalized familiarity with enclosure practices,⁹ although it has been questioned on the basis of more recent scholarship. Thus M E Turner has written that the belief that enclosures were ever widely financed by land sales '... was an erroneous view but one which has been repeated often. It was only during the nineteenth century that land deductions and sales became prevalent. Formerly it was strictly applied to certain charity lands and then only in specific cases.'¹⁰ However, of the 41 parliamentary enclosures in North Somerset between 1770 and 1830 for which awards survive, 37 were financed by the sale of land and only four by the levying of a rate. This difference would be of a positive but limited interest were it not for the possibly different effect of each method on enclosure costs. It has hitherto been assumed that the costs of waste land enclosure were high because of the physical problems associated with the difficult terrain, but a consideration of the practice of raising capital sums by land sale does prompt the suggestion that procedural or administrative factors in these areas may have been as important as the topographical ones.

In North Somerset the land was sold at public auction after due notice in the parish church and in local newspapers. The auctions took place after the commissioners had had time to perambulate the land, assessing its quality and situation on the advice of a surveyor, and they were held at some convenient inn. Meanwhile, a mortgage was arranged, thus allowing work to begin.¹¹ Decisions about the amount to be

auctioned were matters for fine judgement, complicated by two sets of problems.

First, the commissioners had to estimate the internal costs, and here there was an element of uncertainty because of the need for construction works such as drainage channels. However, unexpected and escalating costs could be met by further land sales, of which there is evidence in both the awards and the limited supplementary evidence.¹² As an insurance against such delays the experienced commissioners may have over-estimated the initial acreage to be sold, especially as the legal clause directing the expenditure of any surplus monies on lasting improvements relieved them of the task of dividing this amongst the proprietors. Second, the commissioners had to assess the external factors affecting the value of land, and again they sometimes misjudged the situation, the unexpectedly high prices realized at some auctions providing them with more abundant funds than anticipated. When this happened at the Weston-super-Mare enclosure the proprietors requested that the surplus be spent on further improvements to walls, banks and roads.¹³

The possible significance of these administrative factors will now be seen. Balanced as they were on the twin uncertainties of internal costs and external values, land sales could tend to result in larger sums of capital being raised with greater ease and, therefore, lead to more costly enclosures, than the method of financing by the imposition of a rate, often grudgingly paid under threat of distraint, which could therefore tend to result in cheaper enclosures.

commons to be enclosed was executed to the Rev Henry Harris and £800 was '... paid into the hands of Mr Robert Wright [a commissioner] who is hereby appointed Treasurer'.

¹²For example, SRO, DD/FS, Box 67, FL 'Bleadon Inclosure 1788'. Two sales were held in 1788, but when in June 1789 it was found '... necessary to raise more money for finishing the several works made and to be made in the Inclosure...', a third auction was ordered.

¹³SRO, DD/BK, Correspondence and Papers; Weston-super-Mare Public Ref Lib, LOO/53, S/W17/43, 'Commissioner's Proceedings', 'Commissioner's Accounts' and Sales Bills.

⁹Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present*, 6th edn, 1961, p 251; Gonner, *op cit*, p 90; W H R Curtler, *The Enclosure and Redistribution of our Land*, Oxford, 1920, p 166.

¹⁰Turner, thesis, p 326.

¹¹For example, SRO, Wookey Enclosure Award Q/RDe 134, 1782-86 and SRO, DD/S/CX, 'Proceedings of the Commissioners' 1782-87. In September 1782 a mortgage of the moors and

Evidence on the financing of enclosures in this region has been assembled in Table 1, where columns I to IV display information established from the awards. Although of interest because of their bearing on costs, additional details relating for example to the allotments made are omitted on this occasion because attention is here directed to the acreage sold (column III) and the capital sum thus raised (column IV). The figures in column IV are taken in this study to constitute the total public costs of the enclosures listed. Historic prices are given throughout.

The contents of the last three columns of Table 1 are derived from the information in the first four. Financial costs per acre are shown in column V. The three enclosures of the 1770's for which figures are available support the suggestion that the levying of a rate tended to keep down costs (Doulting and Stoke St Michael, 1775-76, 23.0s per acre) whilst land sales led to higher costs (Compton Bishop, 1777-79, 61.5s per acre, and Brislington, 1778-80, 58.5s per acre), for each case involved the physical problems associated with the waste lands, although these varied for individual enclosures, as did other factors such as acreage. In the only other rate-financed enclosure for which costs are available (Portishead and Weston-in-Gordano, 1807-09), severe administrative problems arose from the need to sort out two inter-mixed parishes, and it may have been this complication which over-ruled the contrast with contemporary cases financed by land sale.

Although land sales meant that proprietors had to meet no direct financial obligations, they did have to face a very real cost in terms of the reduction in the amount of land allotted, and the loss of the future stream of income they would otherwise have received.¹⁴ I propose to call this

the economic cost and to measure it by the percentage of land sold. It is shown in column VII. These financial and economic costs rarely bore with equal severity on the same parish. For example, at Locking (1800-01) the financial cost averaged nearly £10 per acre but the real economic cost in terms of land and income foregone was less than 20 per cent, whilst at Shipham and Winscombe (1797-99) the financial cost was less than £3 per acre but each proprietor lost over half the land to which he was otherwise entitled.

An intriguing aspect of this relationship was the selling price of land, for this influenced both the financial and economic costs. It is shown in column VI. Although a high selling price did not necessarily lead to a reduction in the financial cost of enclosure, it was generally associated with a reduction in the economic cost. This inverse relationship between the auction price of land and the percentage sold is shown in Table 2 where the enclosures for which this evidence is available are ranked according to the former. With some exceptions (such as early enclosures where favourable circumstances led to a high selling price for land), there was a decline over time in the economic cost, which may indicate that in general land values rose faster than the financial costs of enclosure. However, it must be observed that there was here no simple chronological escalation of financial costs in the manner which is usually accounted for elsewhere in terms of war-time inflation and the leaving till last of the more complicated and so more costly cases.

The complexity of the chronological problem may be summarized thus: 2 enclosures with Acts as widely separate as 1775 and 1795 cost below £2 per acre; 8 with Acts from 1778 to 1801 came in the £2 to £3 bracket; 9 with Acts between 1777 and 1809 cost between £3 and £4; 12 with Acts spreading from 1788 to the end of the period cost more than £4 per acre. Some

¹⁴BAO, 01097(5)g, letter of December 1809. The Portbury commoners were aware of this cost and complained that the commissioners had sold 102 acres of the best land, '... leaving only 156 to be divided'.

clues to these widespread variations over time are provided by the various factors which exerted a probable influence on the selling price of land and so indirectly on financial costs. As shown in Table 2 these influences ranged from the possibility of extra-agricultural use (eg as building land) to the changing value of land in relation to its own agricultural possibilities and the prices of arable and animal husbandry products mentioned earlier.

The summarizing of these factors promotes the suggestion that there was at this time not one but several land markets, each with its prevailing values. The force of this point is somewhat obscured in Table 2 because the evidence there relates to the average price at which land was sold, that being for many enclosures the best information which is available. However, the position is clarified in Table 3, which is based on the further analysis of those awards which are sufficiently detailed to allow selling prices to be attributed to different types of land, and those in which only one category of land was offered for sale in any case. This evidence shows that within each land market selling prices moved in distinct but separate patterns, so that whilst, for example, the price of the low moorland acres rose steadily until the early 1790's, when a plateau was reached which continued until the last of the lowlands for which this information is available had been enclosed, the much more modest selling prices of the Mendip uplands moved generally though erratically upwards until the second half of the 1790's, before falling away thereafter.

Conclusions on such a subject are hazardous, but within the context of enclosures made costly by the land sale method of raising capital and by the technical and topographical problems of the waste lands, it was perhaps the operation of these separate land markets which stimulated the puzzling variations in financial costs per acre. Lastly, it may have been because

some of the earlier enclosures for these reasons were made more costly than would otherwise have been the case, and some of the later ones rendered less costly, that the general inflation associated with the years of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars did not in this region (from the evidence based on the awards) result in the large increases in costs relative to earlier years that were more generally the case.

The pursuit of this line of enquiry invests the purchasers of land with a special importance, for their judgement was crucial to the determination of prices within the different markets. From the awards it is possible to make three generalizations. Firstly, most of the land auctioned was bought by those already living in the region, though not necessarily involved in the enclosure in question, nor even living in the same parish. The exceptions to this generalization were mostly from Bristol,¹⁵ but on the whole there was a lack of involvement by its citizens which is surprising in view of the speculations in canal and house building.¹⁶ However, it is probably an indication that the Bristol merchant interest in North Somerset of the earlier decades of the eighteenth century had been exhausted.¹⁷

Secondly, a classification of the purchasers of land has shown that although the gentry predominated there was considerable buying by yeomen farmers, as well as by other country dwellers who had a less personal link with farming.¹⁸ These included local clergymen, doctors, lawyers, and rural tradesmen, who all bought land at the sales. Thirdly, the purchasers occasionally included the enclosure commissioners themselves, for until the turn of the century (41 Geo III c 101) an involvement

¹⁵For example, SRO, Clevedon Enclosure Award, Q/RDe 78, 1799-1801. Land was bought for £918 by a Bristol butcher, with a grazier as trustee.

¹⁶J R Ward, *The Finance of Canal Building in Eighteenth-Century England*, Oxford, 1974, pp 138-40, and 'Speculative Building at Bristol and Clifton, 1783-1793', *Bus Hist*, xx, 1978, pp 3-18.

¹⁷Buchanan, thesis, pp 258-366.

¹⁸*Ibid*, pp 53-7, Table 2(s).

with the executive aspects of the undertaking was not a barrier to the purchase of land, even within the enclosure concerned.¹⁹

The rural base of most purchasers, their status as gentry and farmers, and in several cases their experience of the business of enclosure, together with the general absence of urban speculators, all imply a considerable degree of familiarity with the practice of farming in the region. It is likely, therefore, that the prospective buyers made their bids in the light of an awareness of the agricultural possibilities of the land on offer. This suggests that, despite a current value influenced by the pressing demand for food and the high commodity prices and therefore high rents resulting from this, the land was marginal only in the sense of being the next unit available for cultivation should the cost of bringing it into production be balanced by the revenue it could then produce, and not in the sense of being inherently poor agricultural land. Indeed, in the case of Mendip it was possibly an earlier pre-emption for the production of wool for the local textile industry and for the mining of lead and calamine, all in decline by the mid-eighteenth century, which had restricted it to an agricultural use below its potential.²⁰

III

The enclosure costs for North Somerset will now be compared with the general evidence compiled by B A Holderness, about which this author has concluded that although his tables are provisional '... it is unlikely that further research will modify the trends they reveal very significantly'.²¹

¹⁹See the following awards: SRO, West Hartytree, Q/RDe 18, 1787-90; Wells (East Horrington and Chilcot), Q/RDe 73, 1792-94; Wells (St Cuthbert), Q/RDe 81, 1793-95; Shipham and Winscombe, Q/RDe 13, 1797-99.

²⁰J D Hanwell, 'Agriculture on Mendip' in W G Hall (ed), *Man and the Mendips*, Mendip Society, Frome, 1971, pp 78-9.

²¹B A Holderness, 'Capital Formation in Agriculture' in J P P Higgins and Sidney Pollard (eds), *Aspects of Capital Investment in Great Britain 1750-1850*, 1971, pp 162-70.

It may be seen from Table 4 that average costs in North Somerset, as anticipated, were considerably greater than for the rate-financed parliamentary enclosures (column 1). They were however unexpectedly less than for the waste lands in general (column 4), especially in the significant period 1793 to 1815, and when grouped by the year of the act. It is the reason for this anomaly which will now be pursued, but first a comment must be made about the difference between the North Somerset waste land costs and those for the open fields.

This observation is that the contrast in costs persisted despite certain heavy expenditures which were more likely to be encountered in the open fields than the waste lands. Firstly, the fencing of the tithe owner's allotment could be a very important item in open-field enclosures, amounting in some cases to one-third of the total, but this charge is almost entirely absent from the North Somerset awards.²² Secondly, a cost of open-field enclosure which has no parallel in the North Somerset wastes was the spending on grass seeds, which could be more than 20 per cent of public costs in the earlier decades, though falling away thereafter.²³ Thirdly, expenditure on road making in open-field enclosure was considerable from the 1790's and could amount to between 20 and 30 per cent of costs.²⁴ Again, there is little comparable evidence in the North Somerset awards, some of which even declared no public roads to be necessary (contrary to the general assumption that they would be most needed where waste land was reclaimed). This was the case with seven enclosure awards between 1791 and 1809 when such costs were particularly high in open-field enclosure.²⁵

²²Martin, op cit, pp 148-51, Appendix B.

²³Turner, thesis, pp 322-4, Appendix IX(b).

²⁴Ibid, pp 322-4. Also, Martin, op cit, p 137.

²⁵Public roads were declared unnecessary at Westbury, 1788-91; Bleadon 1788-91; Banwell, 1795-97; Locking, 1800-01; Tick-enham, 1801-03; Worle, 1801-03; Portishead and Weston-in-Gordano, 1807-09.

This difficulty in classifying costs suggests that the polarization between open field and waste land is misleading, and that enclosures may be more instructively viewed as a re-organization of land holding within a wide range of topographical, economic and social conditions. Such an approach may provide a clue to the anomaly mentioned previously, namely the unexpected difference between the average costs of North Somerset enclosures and those of the waste lands in general. If it is assumed that all waste land costs were likely to be similar for topographical and administrative reasons, then this is difficult to explain. But if these were part of a range of conditions and expenditures then it may be that the general waste land costs were heavier than those for North Somerset because of some special difference of circumstance. In particular it may be that whilst the former were increased by the inclusion of reclamation schemes, such as that undertaken in the East, West and Wildmore Fens by John Rennie in the early nineteenth century at a cost of £10 per acre,²⁶ the latter were primarily for the purpose of enclosure, the task of major reclamation being undertaken separately.

This suggestion will now be tested in two stages. First, the expenditure on capital improvements in North Somerset enclosures (ie surveying and construction costs) will be compared with the general evidence, in order to check that the lower overall costs of the former did not mask an investment in capital works as great as that in the waste lands generally. Second, the three comprehensive drainage schemes in the region will be examined to determine their relation to the enclosure schemes upon which they followed.

The rarity of commissioners' accounts in North Somerset means that there is unfortunately little information on the first

matter, but what is available on the distribution of costs within enclosure has been analysed, and that which relates to capital improvements has been set out in Table 5. It must be admitted that this evidence is both too limited (the three enclosures) and too general (that based on John Billingsley), but it does relate to the critical years 1793 to 1815, and it has a certain internal consistency. Thus, in both the upland enclosure at Shipham and Winscombe and the lowland one at Congresbury the construction costs represent about 44 per cent of the public expenditure, and although the proportion was more nearly 59 per cent at Weston-super-Mare, where investment in terms of shillings per acre was also higher, it may be recalled that extra works were undertaken here because unexpectedly high capital sums had been raised. In the general evidence from Billingsley the improvement costs were of a similar order to those in the three specific cases in financial terms, though representing a higher proportion of total costs. But this may simply indicate that, with his first-hand experience of enclosures, Billingsley was able to prevent the escape of certain improvement costs to other categories.²⁷ Unfortunately, in the Shipham and Winscombe enclosure the surveyor's attendance at meetings, though not his field work, was irretrievably accounted for amongst the administrative costs.

A comparison of this evidence with that compiled by Holderness²⁸ suggests that in waste land enclosures generally the investment in capital improvements was twice as great as in North Somerset. Between 1793 and 1801 when the improvement costs for the waste lands in general averaged 66.0s

²⁷John Billingsley (1747-1811) served as commissioner in the following enclosures: West Harptree, 1787-90; Rode and Wingfield, 1790-92; Rodney Stoke, 1791-93; Croscombe and Dinder, 1792-93; Wells (East Horrington and Chilcot), 1792-94; Wells (St Cuthbert), 1793-95; East Harptree, 1794-96; Cheddar, 1795-1801; Cheddar, Priddy and Rodney Stoke, 1811 until his death. He was the author of the *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Somerset, drawn up in the year 1795*, Bath, 1797.

²⁸Holderness, op cit, p 169, Table 3B.

²⁶Holderness, op cit, pp 167-8.

per acre, the North Somerset evidence suggests costs of about 33.0s per acre. For the years 1802 to 1815 the figures were respectively 100.1s per acre and 57.3s per acre, and for the succeeding years they were 76.0s per acre and 32.0s per acre. Despite the very considerable limitations of this comparative evidence, the gap between this investment in the waste lands in general and those in North Somerset is here shown to be so great as to make it unlikely that the large-scale reclamations of the former could have been undertaken within the much lower improvement costs of the latter.

Before considering the role of the drainage schemes it is of interest to refer briefly to those construction works which were undertaken within enclosures. In Table 5 these are arranged under such heads as roads, fences and drainage ditches, but this neat classification belies the great range of provisions revealed by the descriptive evidence in the awards. The setting out of public roads was always a first task, but as already noted these were sometimes found unnecessary. The provision of fencing also varied greatly. Its importance was lessened in the lowlands because the essential drainage ditches could there function as boundaries, thus constituting a reduction in cost. And just as most drainage works were financed from within the undertakings, so until the turn of the century and particularly within the Mendip enclosures it was not uncommon for the fencing of individual allotments to be covered by public costs, though not the subdivisions within farms. After the turn of the century this was less likely, but the outer boundaries (subject to negotiation with adjoining parishes), the public roads, and the land to be sold, were all still likely to be fenced. The allotments relating to special rights, for example those made frequently in lieu of the lord's right of soil, or occasionally in respect of common rights attached to glebe land, or very rarely in lieu of tithes, were

all awarded after the sale of land. Even when fenced as a public cost, therefore, they still bore the economic cost of enclosure. But the fact that in all cases these varied and important construction works were limited to the individual enclosures, suggests that the primary purpose was land reorganization and not comprehensive reclamation. The function of the large drainage undertakings in the lowlands must therefore now be considered.

The general powers of the Commissions of Sewers to seek the control of floodwaters in the Levels were long established.²⁹ But from the later decades of the eighteenth century they were being urged by the agricultural interest to embark upon ambitious new schemes for whole catchment areas, and this they were unwilling to do. Their caution arose essentially from the fear of jeopardizing their personal finances by initiating works towards which those benefiting had no obligations established by traditions of tenure.³⁰ The proprietors were therefore obliged to obtain parliamentary authorization for the improvements they sought, a step which led to the appointment of a body of commissioners with the power to execute certain capital works, financed by the levying of a rate. As with the drainage aspects of enclosure, the administration of the completed works reverted to the Commissioners of Sewers.

The financial aspects of the drainage schemes have been analysed in detail elsewhere, and for present purposes it is only possible to state briefly that in the Axe Drainage (1802-10) the average cost was 80.5s per acre, of which capital improve-

²⁹Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes*, 1922, reprinted 1963, pp 39-45. Their warning that 'this is the most obscure corner in the whole of English Local Government' is still relevant despite the work of Michael Williams, *The Draining of the Somerset Levels*, Cambridge, 1970, for in this the focus of attention is the landscape and not administration and finance.

³⁰SRO, D/RA SW11, 'Proceedings of the Commissioners of Sewers in the business of the Congresbury Drainage' 1811-12, and the 'Case for the opinion of Consr Moore' 30 June 1812, and 18 November 1812.

ments accounted for 65.4s per acre, whilst in the Weston Drainage (1810-15) the figures were respectively 113.3s and 61.5s per acre. In the Congresbury Drainage (1819-26) they were 93.7s and 69.9s per acre.³¹

It cannot be claimed that the same lowland acres were necessarily subject to both parliamentary enclosure and parliamentary drainage schemes, but the overlap was sufficiently great to bestow significance upon an exercise whereby the costs sustained in those parishes which were previously the subject of an enclosure award are related to the costs of the subsequent drainage scheme. For example, in the six parishes enclosed between 1777 and 1801 which later formed part of the Axe Drainage scheme of 1802-10, the combined cost of enclosure (averaging 69.7s per acre) and drainage (80.5s per acre) was 150.2s per acre. This figure for the separate but related processes is comparable to that for the waste lands in general where such works were undertaken jointly at an average cost of 110.0s per acre in the years 1793 to 1801, and 150.0s per acre in the years 1802 to 1815 (Table 4).

The complementary relationship between lowland enclosure and drainage in North Somerset can be examined in greater detail and in terms of capital improvements in one instance, and then only because of the rare survival of the extra-award documents of the Congresbury, Week St Lawrence and Puxton enclosure of 1809-16 which preceded the Congresbury Drainage scheme of 1819-26. The overlap applied to about one-third of the acreage drained; to the personnel, for Young Sturge acted as commissioner for the enclo-

sure and surveyor to both undertakings;³² and to the basic engineering concept, for when John Rennie drew up his drainage plans the proposed new cut from the sea back into the moors linked up with channels dug during the recently completed enclosure.³³

This close constructional relationship was reflected in the financial aspects of the schemes, which provide specific evidence of the general case being made. Thus, in terms of the investment in capital improvements the Congresbury enclosure (32.0s per acre, Table 5) and drainage (69.9s per acre, see above) costs at 101.9s per acre were very close to the putative capital costs of 100.1s per acre for the years 1802-15 for the waste lands generally (see above) though greater than the 76.0s per acre for the years from 1816 when the large reclamations may have been completed.

The conclusion to this analysis is that whilst the average costs of North Somerset enclosures were significantly greater than those for open-field enclosure, they were less than for the waste lands generally because the extensive drainage provisions which commonly featured as an enclosure cost in the latter were to be found in North Somerset as a post-enclosure cost. The Congresbury Enclosure and Drainage schemes offer the most detailed evidence of the close relationship between the two.

Viewed in this perspective the North Somerset enclosures were an organizational preliminary to that further investment in drainage, soil reclamation and farm creation which was essential if the upland and lowland wastes were to be converted into productive farms. But contemporary evidence on rents suggests that because this subsequent and cumulative investment was needed to consolidate the initial capital input through enclosure, the

³¹Buchanan, thesis, pp 98-132 and Tables 3(3) to 3(10). Capital improvement costs here cover those expenditures crucial to the new works: surveying, construction, land purchases, and damages. The last two items were relatively unimportant in the Axe and Congresbury schemes (averaging 9.0s per acre), but more important in the Weston scheme (40.0s per acre) because of the complication presented by a tide mill.

³²Young Sturge was a commissioner in the following enclosures: Portishead, 1807-09; Congresbury, 1809-16; Wraxall, 1813-19; Long Ashton, 1813-20; Uphill, 1813-18; and in the Weston Drainage scheme, 1810-15.

³³SRO, Congresbury Drainage Award, Q/RDe 139.

rates of return in the waste lands were not as high as in the already established agricultural areas where they were less likely to be eroded by such heavy post-enclosure costs.

IV

It is possible the close attention to documentary evidence may place this study amongst those referred to pejoratively as 'antiquarian' and 'source-orientated', but these regional roots provide an informed base from which to probe the accepted notions on the subject, identifying certain problems which the generalizations obscure.

First, there is the question of the way in which enclosures were financed. It has been demonstrated that, contrary to the current view, capital sums were raised by land sale from at least the 1770's. The lack of evidence for the use of this method in other waste land regions may indicate only that this information has not previously been thought relevant, rather than that it does not exist. For example, although land sales were authorized in each of the enclosure acts of the eighteenth century described in detail by the Hammonds in *The Village Labourer*,³⁴ no subsequent study has remarked on this fact, even though that for Holland Fen (1767, 22,000 acres) was in an area which has since inspired much research.³⁵ But the question of how widely this method was employed is an important one, both in the context of the individual enclosures, for it freed the commissioners from the constraints of rate finance, and in that of the subject as a whole, for about one-third of all enclosure was of the com-

mons and wastes.³⁶ Clearly more evidence is needed, and if a distinction could be made between land sales as a valid alternative to rate finance, and land deductions as only one of several ways of meeting the rate, then the subject could be placed upon a much firmer analytical foundation.³⁷

Second, there is the matter of the influences upon the cost of enclosure. These are usually discussed in terms of the physical problems and the claims to land, but the recognition of the importance of certain administrative procedures and of the land sales to which they gave rise, places the subject in a new perspective by shifting the focus from the endogenously determined demand for capital to the question of its supply. Not only did this resort to the land market affect the magnitude of the capital sum available, it also introduced an element of personal judgement into the business of enclosure (whether through the commissioners' decisions about the amount of land to be sold or the purchasers' decisions about the price of land to be bought) and so allowed a note of unpredictability to enter into the financial and economic costs and their variations over time.

Third, there is the problem of classification. Ambiguities arise at several levels, and in so far as such evidence is used as a basis for generalization or aggregation they are a serious matter. It is probable that much construction work financed by surplus funds within the North Somerset enclosures, or as part of large-scale reclamation within the waste lands generally, should be more properly regarded as an investment consequent upon enclosure than a cost of enclosure itself. Such distinctions are difficult to establish within the

³⁴J L and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer 1760-1832*, 1920, pp 309-30. John Chapman has recently drawn attention to the re-distributive aspect of land sales, 'Land purchasers at enclosure: evidence from West Sussex', *Local Historien*, XII, 1977, pp 337-41, but without reference to the capital sums raised or the dates of the enclosures.

³⁵H C Darby, *The Draining of the Fens*, Cambridge, 1940, revised 1969; D B Grigg, *The Agricultural Revolution in South Lincolnshire*, Cambridge, 1966; Dorothy Summers, *The Great Level*, Newton Abbot, 1976.

³⁶Turner, op cit, 1980, pp 69-71, Table 11. 27.7 per cent of all parliamentary enclosure before 1793 was of commons and waste and 31.3 per cent of all that between 1793 and 1815.

³⁷Since completing this article I have been able to read Dr Turner's forthcoming study, 'Cost, Finance and Parliamentary Enclosure', to be published in the *Econ Hist Rev*. I am most grateful to him for this opportunity.

overall sum recorded as that raised to finance the undertaking, but the identification of this problem, and of others raised here, shows the importance of regional evidence. It is thus as both a significant part of the general subject in its

own right and as a corrective to the traditional emphasis on the open fields, that waste land enclosures in their financial aspects constitute an important but neglected area of research.

TABLE I
Parliamentary Enclosure in North Somerset, 1770-1830

SRO Q/RDe	Parish	I Act Award	II Acreage enclosed	Common Land			III Land Sold Acres	IV Cost of Enclosure £	V Financial Cost per Acre shillings	VI Selling Price of Land Per Acre shillings	VII Economic Cost. Per- centage Sold
				Lowland Waste	Upland Waste	Open Fields					
—	Cranmore	1770	(400) ¹		Mendip						
62	Ubley	1771-73	902		Mendip		164				18.2
58	Doultling and Stoke St Michael	1775-76	1,200		Mendip		Rate Levied	1,382	23.0		
117	Compton Bishop	1777-79	275	Moors			28	845	61.5	603.6	10.2
130	Brislington	1778-80	400		Brislington Common		20	1,170	58.5	1,170.0	5.0
27	Shepton Mallet	1782-85	724		Mendip		Rate Levied				
134	Wookey	1782-86	1,193	Moors	Mendip		411	4,338	72.7	211.1	34.5
132	Blagdon	1784-87	967		Mendip		283	2,061	42.6	145.7	29.3
18	West Harptree	1787-90	857		Mendip		438	2,703	63.1	123.4	51.1
22	Bleadon	1788-91	1,194	Moors	Mendip		243	5,955	99.7	490.1	20.4
71	Compton Martin	1788-91	[664]		Mendip		372	[2,232]	67.2	120.0	56.0
21	Westbury	1788-91	841	Moors	Mendip		166	3,091	73.5	372.4	19.7
55	Rode and Wingfield	1790-92	489		Rode Common		53				10.8
74	Rodney Stoke	1791-93	754	Moors			56 Rate Levied	2,788	73.9	995.7	7.4
72	Croscombe and Dinder	1792-93	603		Mendip						
73	Wells (East Horrington and Chilcot)	1792-94	701		Mendip		126	[1,449]	41.3	230.0	18.0
47	Kewstoke	1793-94	160	Moors			16	903	112.9	1,128.8	10.0
81	Wells (Out Parish of St Cuthbert)	1793-95	4,343	Moors	Mendip		773	11,319	52.1	292.9	17.8
65	East Harptree	1794-96	1,033		Mendip		255	2,580	49.9	202.3	24.7
41	Pilton and North Wotton	1794-96	961	Moors 882 acres	Mendip 79 acres		62	3,199 ²	72.5	1,031.9	7.0
42	Banwell	1795-97	1,001	Moors	Mendip		138	4,060	81.1	588.4	13.8
38	Cheddar	1795-1801	(4,400)	Moors	Mendip		587	8,119	36.9	276.6	13.3

← 4,000 acres →

400
acres
Open
Fields

SRO
Q/RDe

23 C

13 S

76 I

78 C

70 I

46

53

6

60

133

123

124

135

33

119

24

129

4

88

113

Source:

Notes:

TABLE I (continued)

SRO Q/RDe	Parish	Act — Award	I Acreage enclosed	II Common Land			III Land Sold Acres	IV Cost of Enclosure £	V Financial Cost per Acre shillings	VI Selling Price of Land Per Acre shillings	VII Economic Cost, Per- centage Sold
				Lowland Waste	Upland Waste	Open Fields					
23	Chewton	1797-1800	2,266		Mendip		345	5,567	49.1	322.7	15.2
13	Shipham and Winscombe	1797-99	1,072		Mendip		550	3,129	58.4	113.8	51.3
76	Portbury	1798-1806	962	Moors	Mendip Outlier		244	5,393	112.1	442.0	25.4
78	Clevedon	1799-1801	488	Moors	Mendip Outlier		52	1,762	72.2	677.7	10.7
70	Locking	1800-01	(161)	Moors			31	1,605	199.4	1,035.5	19.2
46	Tickenham	1801-03	561	Moors	Mendip Outlier		57	1,658	59.1	581.7	10.2
53	Worle	1801-03	211	Moors	Mendip		120	1,232	116.8	205.3	56.9
6	Backwell	1807-12	(885)		Mendip Outlier		277				31.3
60	Portishead and Weston- in-Gordano	1807-09	(800)	Moors	Mendip Outlier		Two Rates Levied	3,430	85.8		
133	Congresbury, Week St Lawrence and Puxton	1809 and 1814-16	(820)	Moors	Mendip Outlier	Open Fields	92	3,257	79.4	708.0	11.2
123	Weston- super-Marc	1810-15	993	437 acres Moors	417 acres Mendip	139 acres Open Fields	72	4,972	100.1	1,381.1	7.2
124	Wroughton and	1810-13	(3,650)	Moors	Mendip Outlier		210 + 345	555			15.2
135	Yatton and Kenn	1810-15									
33	Cheddar, Priddy and Rodney Stoke	1811 and 1816-21	(1,100)		Mendip		644	7,570	137.6	235.1	58.5
119	Long Ashton	1813-20	(690)		Mendip Outlier	Open Fields	65				9.4
24	Uphill	1813-18	388	Moors ← 348 acres →	Mendip	40 acres Open Fields	57				14.7
129	Wraxall, Nailsca and Flax Bourton	1813-19	(1,617)	Moors	Mendip Outlier	Open Fields	96	(21 acres sold for £1,279 = 1,218.1 per acre)			5.9
4	Berkley and Standerwick	1814-18	(300)		Commons	Open Fields	49	1,794	119.6	732.2	16.3
88	Portishead	1814-23	703		403 acres Mendip Outlier	300 acres Open Fields	41	2,150 ¹	106.7	1,048.8	10.2
113	Dundry	1815-19	(236)		Cotswold Outlier		46	[1,821]	154.3	791.7	19.5

Source: Enclosure awards as indicated.

Notes: 1 Parentheses indicate an estimated figure, usually derived from the Act of Parliament. Square brackets indicate a figure arrived at by calculation, usually from information within the award.

2 Costs do not refer to the upland acres, as the Mendip proprietors asked that they should pay their own charges.

3 Costs do not refer to the open fields, whose proprietors bore a separate charge. This discretionary power was authorized in four of the later acts covering both waste lands and open fields, but it appears to have been exercised only in this case.

TABLE 2
North Somerset Enclosures Ranked According to Average Selling Price of Land Per Acre

<i>Act</i>	<i>Parish</i>	<i>Average Selling Price Per Acre Shillings</i>	<i>Percentage of Land Sold</i>	<i>Cost of Enclosure Per Acre Shillings</i>	<i>Factors Influencing Price of Land</i>
1810	Weston-super-Mare	1,381.1	7.2	100.1	Extra- agricultural value
1813	Wraxall, Nailsea, etc	1,218.1	5.9	No Evidence	
1778	Brislington	1,170.0	5.0	58.5	
1793	Kewstoke	1,128.8	10.0	112.9	
1814	Portishead	1,048.8	10.2	106.7	Grazing land
1800	Locking	1,035.5	19.2	199.4	
1794	Pilton and North Wotton	1,031.9	7.0	72.5	
1791	Rodney Stoke	995.7	7.4	73.9	
1815	Dundry	791.7	19.5	154.3	Proximity to markets
1814	Berkley and Standerwick	732.2	16.3	119.6	
1809	Congresbury	708.0	11.2	79.4	
1799	Clevedon	677.7	10.7	72.2	
1777	Compton Bishop	603.6	10.2	61.5	Grazing land but with value lowered by lesser quality moorland (salt wharves) or inclusion of uplands
1795	Banwell	588.4	13.8	81.1	
1801	Tickenham	581.7	10.2	59.1	
1788	Bleadon	490.1	20.4	99.7	
1798	Portbury	442.0	25.4	112.1	
1788	Westbury	372.4	19.7	73.5	
1797	Chewton Mendip	322.7	15.2	49.1	(moors) (moors) Mendip Commons with values raised in two cases by inclusion of moorlands
1793	Wells	292.9	17.8	52.1	
1795	Cheddar	276.6	13.3	36.9	
1811	Cheddar	235.1	58.5	137.6	
1792	Wells	230.0	18.0	41.3	
1782	Wookey	211.1	34.5	72.7	
1801	Worle	205.3	56.9	116.8	
1794	East Harptree	202.3	24.7	49.9	
1784	Blagdon	145.7	29.3	42.6	
1787	West Harptree	123.4	51.1	63.1	
1788	Compton Martin	120.0	56.0	67.2	
1797	Shipham and Winscombe	113.8	51.3	58.4	

Source: See Table 1.

TABLE 3
Variations in Land Value Within North Somerset Enclosures

		<i>Selling Price in Shillings Per Acre</i>				
<i>Act</i>	<i>Parish</i>	<i>Moors</i>	<i>Mendips</i>	<i>Other Lowlands</i>	<i>Other Uplands</i>	<i>Non-agricultural Use</i>
1777	Compton Bishop	603.6				
1778	Brislington					1,170.0
1782	Wookey	671.6	89.2			
1784	Blagdon		145.7			
1787	West Harptree		123.4			
1788	Bleadon	807.8	266.0			
1788	Compton Martin		120.0			
1788	Westbury	904.9	197.8			
1791	Rodney Stoke	995.7				
1792	Wells		230.0			
1793	Kewstoke	1,128.8				
1793	Wells	1,240.0	225.3			
1794	East Harptree		202.3			
1794	Pilton and N Wotton	1,031.9				
1795	Banwell	1,075.0	366.7			
1795	Cheddar	1,129.8	129.2			
1797	Chewton Mendip		322.7			
1797	Shipham and Winscombe		113.8			
1798	Portbury			667.7	244.8	
1799	Clevedon			677.7		
1800	Locking	1,035.5				
1801	Tickenham			581.7		
1801	Worle		205.3			
1809	Congresbury	2,800.0			347.2	
1810	Weston-super-Mare	1,329.5				1,667.2
1811	Cheddar		235.1			
1813	Wraxall, Nailsea, etc					1,218.1
1814	Berkley and Standerwick				732.2	
1814	Portishead				765.9	3,624.6
1815	Dundry				791.7	

Source: From additional evidence in the enclosure awards this Table develops the findings of Table I, column VI.

TABLE 4
Average Cost per Acre of Parliamentary Enclosure (in shillings)

Period	1	2		3		4	Period
	Parliamentary Enclosure	Act	North Somerset Award	Act	North Somerset Award	Parliamentary Waste Land Enclosure	
1740-59	10.5 (30)						Before 1760
1760-69	12.7 (76)					40.0	
1770-79	19.3 (88)	47.7 (3)	42.2 (2)				
1780-89	19.2 (34)	69.8 (6)	57.9 (3)	61.5 (11)	62.4 (9)	65.0	1761-92
1790-99	31.0 (73)	67.7 (12)	70.5 (12)	82.5 (13)	75.0 (12)	110.0	1793-1801
1800-15	42.8 (17)	115.9 (10)	92.4 (9)	111.9 (7)	94.8 (5)	150.0	1802-15
1816-	67.3 (8)		119.5 (5)		119.5 (5)	120.0	1816-

Parentheses indicate number of awards consulted

Sources:

Cols 1 and 4 Holderness, op cit, pp 162-9. From the table on which col 1 is based administrative costs were excluded.
Cols 2 and 3 Table 1. In the absence of any general convention as to the grouping of enclosure costs by the year of the act (Turner, thesis, pp 286-7) or the award (Martin, op cit, pp 145-7), both are shown here. In col 2 this evidence is timed to fit with col 1. That in col 3 fits with col 4.

TABLE 5
Analysis of Capital Improvement Costs in North Somerset Enclosures

	Surveyor's Fees £	Roads £	Fences and Walls £	Drainage Ditches £	Gates and Bridges £	Total Cost of Construction £	Improvement Costs Per Acre Shillings
1 Mendip Enclosures mid-1790's	80	350	850		56	1,336	33.4
2 Lowland Enclosures mid-1790's	140	450		850	140	1,580	39.5
3 Shipham and Winscombe Enclosure 1797-99	106	46	1,262		Included in Roads	1,414	26.4
4 Weston-super-Mare Enclosure 1810-15	399	2,448 including sea wall				2,847	57.3
5 Congresbury, Week St Lawrence and Puxton Enclosure 1809-16	916	including road making costs of £102			398 Bridges	1,314	32.0

Sources: 1 and 2 Billingsley, op cit, pp 55-62.

3 SRO Q/RDe 13.

4 SRO Q/RDe 123; WSM Pub Ref Lib LOO/53, S/W17/43.

5 SRO Q/RDe 133; BAO 32395(21), 25642.